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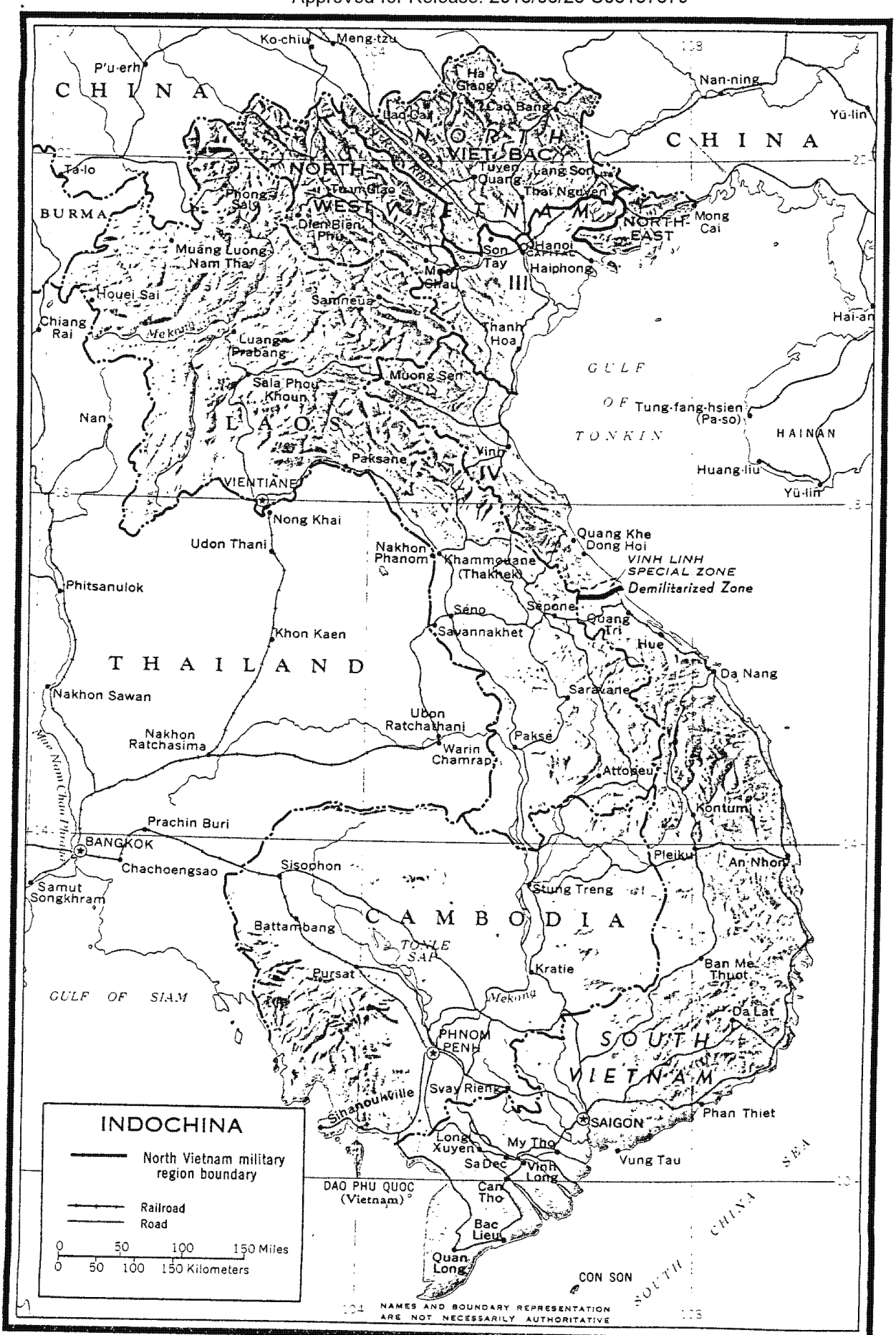

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CAPABILITIES OF THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS FOR FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists to conduct military operations in South Vietnam over the next year or so.[2]

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Our earlier understanding of overall Communist capabilities in Vietnam had, of necessity, to rely heavily on data provided by the GVN. Much of this turned out to be unreliable, and in many instances our numerical estimates of Communist forces, other than for the Regular units, were too low. Our information has improved substantially in the past year or two, but the unconventional nature of the war poses difficult intelligence problems, the more so in a social environment where basic data is incomplete and often untrustworthy.

Manpower, for example, is a key element for the Communists but we lack precise basic data on population size, rates of growth, and age distribution for both North and South Vietnam. Assessing Communist capabilities also involves an understanding of the organization and effectiveness of the various components in the Communist military and political apparatus in South Vietnam. Much of the evidence on these components is obtained from a variety of sources, including captured documents, of varying reliability and timeliness. The analysis of this data, as well as that concerning North Vietnamese support to the South and all manpower questions requires complex methodological approaches which cannot rise above the uncertain data inputs.

[2] The figures in this estimate are current as of 1 October 1967.

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Our data and conclusions are therefore subject to continuing review and revision, especially since capabilities do not remain static. In this estimate we have concentrated on reaching the best judgments of the current strength of the Communist forces and, because of incomplete and unreliable basic data, we have not attempted to reconstruct Communist strength retrospectively.

Reservations with respect to evidence are explained where appropriate in the individual sections of the estimate. The main conclusions which follow, however, allow for such uncertainties in the supporting intelligence, represent our best appreciation of the overall situation as it now stands, and are based on the assumption that there is no radical change in the scale and nature of the war.

CONCLUSIONS

A. During the past year, Hanoi's direct control and share of the burden of the war in South Vietnam has grown substantially. This trend will continue.

B. Manpower is a major problem confronting the Communists. Losses have been increasing and recruitment in South Vietnam is becoming more difficult. Despite heavy infiltration from North Vietnam, the strength of the Communist military forces and political organizations in South Vietnam declined in the last year.

C. The major portion of this decline has probably been felt at the lower levels, reflecting a deliberate policy of sacrificing these levels to maintain the structure of political cadres and the strength of the Regular military forces. In particular the guerrillas, now estimated to total some 70,000-90,000, have suffered a substantial reduction since the estimated peak of about early 1966. Regular force strength, now estimated at 118,000, has declined only slightly, but Viet Cong (VC) units are increasingly dependent upon North Vietnamese replacements.

D. Given current Communist strategy, and levels of operations, a major effort will be necessary if the Regular forces and the guerrillas are to be maintained at or near present levels. To do so will require both a level of infiltration much higher than that observed in 1967 and intensive VC recruitment as well. Considering all the relevant factors, however, we believe there is a fairly good chance that the

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overall strength and effectiveness of the military forces and the political infrastructure will continue to decline.

E. The Communist leadership is already having problems in maintaining morale and quality. These problems have not yet impaired overall military effectiveness, but they are likely to become more difficult.

F. Difficulties in internal distribution will continue to cause local shortages and interfere with Communist operations from time to time. But we believe that the Communists will be able to continue to meet at least their essential supply requirement for the level of forces and activities in South Vietnam described in this estimate.

G. Communist strategy is to sustain a protracted war of attrition and to persuade the US that it must pull out or settle on Hanoi's terms. Our judgment is that the Communists still retain adequate capabilities to support this strategy for at least another year. Whether or not Hanoi does in fact persist with this strategy depends not only on its capabilities to do so, but on a number of political and international considerations not treated in this estimate.

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DISCUSSION

1. It has become increasingly obvious that Hanoi's share of the burden of war in South Vietnam has grown substantially. Infiltration of personnel in 1966, particularly into the northern provinces, was more than twice that of 1965. Hanoi's direct control of military and political operations has become more evident. The supply of weapons from the North has continued, and new weapons of greater firepower have been introduced. The logistical systems within North Vietnam and in Laos and Cambodia have been expanded since 1965 to provide a greater flexibility to cope with the effects of air interdiction, thereby enabling the Communists to meet higher levels of combat and support the growth of their forces to at least their present levels.

I. CAPABILITIES OF NORTH VIETNAM

A. Manpower and Mobilization Potential

2. The growing intensity of the war in the South and more than two years of US air strikes against the North have made manpower an increasingly important aspect in estimating Communist capabilities. Since mid-1965 the North Vietnamese Armed Forces have expanded from an estimated 250,000 men to at least 470,000. This expansion includes those troops in Laos and South Vietnam. The bulk of the physically fit draft age class of 17-year-olds (about 100,000 each year) is being taken into military service. The war in general and the bombing in particular have forced Hanoi to divert from 500,000 to 600,000 civilians (men and women, young and old) to full-time and part-time war-related activities.

3. Nevertheless, it does not appear that North Vietnam is encountering insurmountable problems in obtaining sufficient able-bodied men to support the war in South Vietnam. Of North Vietnam's total population of over 18 million, about 4 million or so are males between 15 and 49, and about half of these are probably physically fit for military service.[3] At present, the North Vietnamese Armed Forces have taken less than one-quarter of the fit males aged 15 to 49 and less than two-fifths of the approximately 1.2 million fit males in the prime military ages of 17 to 35. Though there is some evidence of lowering of draft standards and extending of age limits, it appears that, with a few local exceptions, Hanoi is still drafting only those between the ages of 17 and 35.

4. The number of physically fit males above and beyond the annual increment of those reaching age 17 and who are not yet in the armed forces is substantial. The most obvious source of manpower is agriculture, where there are almost 3 million men of all ages, and where per capita production is low. There are also about half a million men in the service sector of the economy, including

[3] These figures are based on US Census Bureau estimates of North Vietnam's population, which do not accept entirely the figures of North Vietnam's 1960 census and subsequent demographic statistics published through 1963.

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170,000 in consumer services; almost half a million men in industry, over half of whom are in handicrafts; and some 60,000 male students of military age.

5. There is of course no fixed percentage of these men who can be spared for military duty. Hanoi has already drawn men from the civilian economy for military and war-related tasks, replacing them where possible with women. Taking large additional numbers of men would obviously involve some additional costs to the civilian economy, but this would be a question of priorities in Hanoi. Losses in agricultural and industrial production can be made up by imports to the extent necessary to maintain essential subsistence levels of consumption; consumer services are to some degree expendable and education can be postponed. Thus we believe that the manpower problem, while growing more serious, is still manageable in North Vietnam. At a conservative estimate we believe there are some 100,000 to 200,000 men who could be called into military service, in addition to the annual draft class.

B. The Armed Forces

6. The North Vietnamese Armed Forces expanded last year and are now estimated to total about 470,000. Despite better evidence on their strength, there are still some uncertainties concerning the actual strength of units, the number of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops in Laos, and the size of the Armed Public Security Forces. The following table should be regarded as a conservative estimate.

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES
1 October 1967
SUMMARY

Army	447,500
Air Force	4,500
Navy	2,500
Armed Public Security Forces	16,500
TOTAL Armed Forces	471,000
North Vietnamese Army Breakdown	
Out-of-Country	
South Vietnam	54,000
Laos	18,000
TOTAL	72,000
In-Country	
Infantry	171,500
Air Defense [a]	93,000
Other [b]	111,000
TOTAL	375,500

[a] This includes only regular army personnel in AAA units, radar, and SAM battalions. It does not include part-time air defense personnel such as militia, or logistical troops supporting air defense.

[b] This includes artillery, armor, high command, logistics, engineers, and transportation.

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7. If the recruitment of men for replacements and for unit infiltration into the South should become a critical problem for Hanoi, as a last resort it could draw down its standing military establishment in North Vietnam. The number of troops which could be released for out-of-country duty would be influenced greatly by Hanoi's concern to retain a sizable force for defense against a possible invasion. If, for example, Hanoi should want to keep some 225,000 troops for the defense of North Vietnam and another 85,000 as a training base and for command and administration, then some 65,000 additional NVA troops could be made available for use outside of North Vietnam.

C. Military Training and Leadership

8. Special preinfiltration training of North Vietnamese recruits has averaged about 3 months, although increasing numbers of prisoners report training of only 1 month prior to infiltration. There is evidence of a growing deficiency of properly trained personnel to fill the ranks of squad leaders, platoon sergeants, and platoon leaders. There are indications that the normal source of platoon leaders, the Infantry Officers' School near Son Tay, has reduced its 2-year course to 8 months. The bulk of the reserve officers and noncommissioned officers have been recalled to active duty. The largest single source of junior officers is now from battlefield commissions.

D. Infiltration

9. North Vietnam has the capability to train 75,000-100,000 men a year for infiltration. By shortening current training cycles or increasing the number of units involved in the training of new recruits, this number could be substantially increased. Training replacements at the rate of 75,000-100,000 annually, however, would not permit organizing all of them into units and providing them with the necessary leadership at the same rate. Theoretically, North Vietnam could train and form 24-36 infantry regiments (48,000-72,000 men) per year, but at this pace there would be a considerable reduction in quality. In any case, actual formation and training of organized units for infiltration has been well short of this theoretical capability.

10. During 1966 at least 55,000 and possibly as many as 86,000 North Vietnamese troops were sent into South Vietnam (see Table 2). Through July 1966, the bulk of the infiltration was accounted for by the introduction of organized infantry regiments, including three regiments that moved directly across the DMZ. After July the pace of infiltration slackened somewhat, and it appeared that the Communist Regular force structure had reached planned levels. Most of the infiltration thereafter was to provide replacements in existing units.

11. During 1967, however, the introduction of organized units resumed—six regiments thus far—and the flow of individual replacements has continued. This mixture of units and individual replacements, plus the special situation along the DMZ, complicates an estimate of total infiltration. Not only is there the usual lag in identifying new units and infiltration groups, but there is less chance

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TABLE 2

MONTHLY INFILTRATION: 1966-1967 [a]

(Data as of 30 September 1967)

		Accepted				Monthly
		Confirmed	Probable	TOTAL	Possible	TOTALS
1966	Jan	4,200	1,800	6,000	3,000	9,000
	Feb	6,900	2,200	9,100	2,100	11,200
	Mar	11,700	1,400	13,100	3,600	16,700
	Apr	100	500	600	600	1,200
	May	1,300	500	1,800	3,600	5,400
	June	12,300	700	13,000	1,700	14,700
	July	4,000	700	4,700	4,100	8,800
	Aug	1,800	400	2,200	3,700	5,900
	Sept	1,400	700	2,100	600	2,700
	Oct	100	600	700	4,700	5,400
	Nov	500	100	600	600	1,200
	Dec	800	600	1,400	2,500	3,900
TOTAL 1966		45,100	10,200	55,300	30,800	86,100
1967	Jan	1,000	800	1,800	3,600	5,400
	Feb	1,700	2,000	3,700	1,300	5,000
	Mar	3,600	400	4,000	4,600	8,600
	Apr	3,700	600	4,300	300	4,600
	May	2,700	1,500	4,200	1,600	5,800
	June	3,300	—	3,300	300	3,600
	July	—	400	400	—	400
	Aug	1,100	—	1,100	700	1,800
	Sept	—	—	—	—	—

[a] Infiltration includes only arrivals in South Vietnam. Statistics for 1967 are subject to retroactive updating because of the continuing receipt of new information. In particular, the figures for the last 6 months or so are incomplete, and inadequate to determine trends. These figures include the following categories:

ACCEPTED: *Accepted Confirmed:* A confirmed infiltration unit/group is one which is accepted in South Vietnam on the basis of information provided by a minimum of two POW's or returnees from the unit/group, or two captured documents from the unit, or a combination of personnel and documents.
Accepted Probable: A probable infiltration unit/group is one which is accepted in South Vietnam on the basis of information provided by one POW or returnee from the unit/group, or a captured document, supported by information from other sources which can be evaluated as probably true.

POSSIBLE: A *possible* infiltration unit/group is one which may be in South Vietnam on the basis of information which can be evaluated as possibly true even though no POW, returnee, or document is available to verify the reports.

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of capturing personnel or documents from each of the numerous small replacement groups. There is also the problem of the units that suffer casualties in the DMZ area and return to North Vietnamese territory for replacements; these latter cannot always be identified as new infiltrators when the units return to South Vietnamese territory. A similar problem applies to other border areas.

12. Infiltration thus far in 1967 totals about 35,000 in all categories (accepted and possible). Allowing for the probability that later information will raise these figures, and extrapolating, it now appears that total infiltration for 1967 will be no more than last year's and possibly somewhat less. We estimate that some 65 to 75 percent of the infiltration will probably consist of replacement personnel for existing units. The remainder will probably include seven to nine organized regiments which will add to the Communist force structure but not necessarily their total military strength, because losses have resulted in generally lower unit strengths. There still appears to be no clear-cut seasonal pattern in infiltration or any significant indication that Hanoi is unwilling to dispatch additional men and units to South Vietnam.

E. LOCs [4]

13. Supplies for Communist forces move into South Vietnam by various means. In North Vietnam, truck, rail, and water transport are used to bring supplies through Military Region 4 (MR-4). From MR-4, most supplies are trucked through Laos, although some use of waterways is also made in Laos. Some supplies move directly across the DMZ, and some are moved by sea. In addition, some supplies from Cambodia enter South Vietnam directly while others are routed through Laos.

14. *Roads.* The Communist logistical roadnet in MR-4 in North Vietnam and in Laos was improved over the past year. Though the improvements have increased tonnage capacities somewhat, they were intended primarily to provide additional flexibility for the system and better year-round movement. One development was the extension of a new motorable road from Laos directly into the A Shau Valley of South Vietnam. In addition, the administration and operational control of the LOCs have been improved and expanded. The capacity of the entire system for delivery of supplies to South Vietnam through Laos continues to be limited by the capacities of the routes in Laos rather than by those of North Vietnam.

15. *Trucks.* We estimate that at the end of 1965 the North Vietnamese had an inventory of between 11,000 and 12,000 trucks. Losses from air attack have been substantial, and North Vietnam has been forced to increase its imports to counter this attrition. Imports from Eastern Europe, the USSR, and China have enabled North Vietnam roughly to maintain the size of its inventory.

16. Maintenance problems have increased, and as many as 30 percent of the trucks may not be operable on a daily basis. There is a lack of well-equipped,

[4] See centerspread map.

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properly manned maintenance facilities, and the variety of truck imports has resulted in a fleet of over 30 models from at least seven different countries. POL imports into North Vietnam during the first half of 1967 have been at record levels, and we have had no evidence of any serious POL shortages affecting the movement of supplies to South Vietnam.

17. *Waterways.* The coastal and inland waterway system in North Vietnam provides a useful supplement to the road and rail system and has been used extensively, particularly since the start of the US bombing program. Although the mining of some North Vietnamese waterways has reduced the movement of large craft, small boat traffic continues. Increasing imports of barges and barge sections into North Vietnam and a program of waterway improvement indicate that the Communists intend to exploit further the potentialities of these water routes. In Laos, there has been increased use of small pirogues and motorboats on rivers over the last year. The use of these waterways will probably continue to increase.

18. *Rail.* The North Vietnamese also use the rail line south of Hanoi for movement of supplies into MR-4. Despite repeated US air attacks, the North Vietnamese have been able to construct bypasses and keep sections of the line serviceable from Hanoi to Vinh. South of Vinh the rail line is not operable for regular rail equipment. The North Vietnamese can only use light gear, principally trucks with converted wheels, to transport supplies over the remaining rail segment in this area.

19. *Impact of Air Attacks.* Air attacks in North Vietnam, Laos, and the DMZ have destroyed trucks, railroad rolling stock, and watercraft, have damaged the highway and rail systems, and have restricted the movement of cargo and personnel particularly during daylight hours. They have created construction problems and delays, caused interruptions in the flow of men and supplies, caused a great loss of work-hours, and forced North Vietnam to tie up large numbers of people in air defense and in the repair of LOCs. Communist countermeasures in North Vietnam and Laos have included diversification of the means of transport to include greater use of inland waterways and porter trails, construction of alternate roads, and of multiple bypasses at important bridges. A number of truck parks and vehicle pulloffs for quick convoy dispersal have been built. These measures have increased the ability of the Communists to cope with the effects of air attacks, although at a considerable cost and effort. Units and personnel moving to South Vietnam have been forced to move under cover of darkness, slowing their movement and subjecting them to the rigors of the trail for longer periods.

20. *Cambodia.* The importance of Cambodia as a sanctuary and a source of supply (principally rice) to the Communist war effort is substantial and growing. Recently captured documents indicate that some Communist units in Tay Ninh

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Province have substantially increased their purchases in Cambodia since March 1966. The movement of supplies in Cambodia to Communist forces along the border, particularly on the Se San and Tonle Kong Rivers in the northeast and along Route 110 in Laos, has increased in the past year. Indications are that Communist units along the Cambodian border have been stockpiling some of the food and other materials obtained from Cambodia.

21. There is still no good evidence, however, that substantial amounts of weapons or ammunition are being obtained by the Communists from Cambodian stocks or through Cambodian ports. On the other hand, there is evidence that Communist units, particularly in the border area, receive arms and ammunition from stockpiles maintained on Cambodian territory. These munitions probably were moved south through Laos. Should infiltration of arms into South Vietnam through Laos be substantially reduced, Cambodia could be an alternative route for the Communists.

22. *Sea Infiltration.* We are unable to estimate the extent of the infiltration of supplies by sea into South Vietnam. We believe, however, that such infiltration has been greatly reduced by US countereffforts. Much of the Communists' use of sea routes, at present, is for the movement of supplies along the South Vietnamese coast. We believe that when a pressing need exists North Vietnam will increase attempts to move some supplies by sea, primarily arms and ammunition.

II. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE SOUTH

A. Communist Forces

23. For the purpose of this estimate, we consider the following elements of the Communist organization in South Vietnam: the Regular forces (NVA and VC Main and Local forces), the administrative service units which support them, the VC guerrilla forces, the political cadres, the self-defense forces, the secret self-defense forces, and the "Assault Youth." The contribution of these diverse elements to the Communist effort in South Vietnam differs widely in value. Their capabilities and missions are set forth in the following paragraphs.

24. We believe that, with the exception of the Regular forces, we have previously underestimated the strength of these elements. The figures carried in this estimate for these elements reflect new information and analysis rather than an increase in actual Communist strength. Furthermore, our information on the strength and organization of the different elements varies widely. For the Regular forces it is good; for other components it is much less reliable, less current, and less detailed. The resulting uncertainties are explained in the following paragraphs and are reflected by the use of ranges in the estimates we present.

25. *Regular Forces.* We are reasonably confident that the Communist Regular forces in South Vietnam now total about 118,000 troops who are generally well-armed (see Table 3). This strength has fluctuated over the past 12 months; it is now somewhat less than it was at this time last year. During this period,

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however, an increasing number of NVA replacements have been introduced into VC Main force units.

TABLE 3

ESTIMATED STRENGTH OF REGULAR COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(As of 1 October 1967)

Type	Number	Organization
Regular NVA Forces	54,000	3 Front Headquarters[a]
		7 Division Headquarters[b] [c]
		26 Regiments (18 divisional and 8 separate)
		106 Battalions (76 regimental and 30 separate)
VC Main and Local Forces	64,000[d]	2 Division Headquarters[b]
		11 Regiments (7 divisional and 4 separate)
		96 Battalions (34 regimental and 62 separate)
		234 Separate Companies
		54 Separate Platoons
TOTAL	118,000	

[a] A Front is a military organization designed to perform tactical and administrative functions and to control a number of units in a specific area. A Front is intentionally flexible, its military force composition changes as operational requirements dictate. Vietnamese Communist Fronts currently operating against South Vietnam are the B-3 Front, the DMZ Front, and the Northern Front or Subregion (now called the Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region). (See map on page 17.)

[b] NVA/VC divisions in South Vietnam are considered as light infantry divisions tailored specifically for operation in South Vietnam. These divisions are highly foot-mobile and are flexible in force structure, organization, and strength. They normally are composed of three regiments (of about 1,500-2,000 per regiment) with varying technical and fire support elements. They lack wheeled transport and the type of artillery normally associated with NVA conventional divisions.

[c] In addition to the seven NVA divisions in South Vietnam, elements of the 341st division in North Vietnam have been committed from time to time to operations south of the DMZ under control of the DMZ Front.

[d] This total includes some NVA replacements; see paragraph 56.

26. *Administrative Service Units.* There is an extensive system for the administrative support of both NVA and VC Regular forces. It operates throughout South Vietnam and extends into Laos and Cambodia as well as the area immediately north of the DMZ. In South Vietnam it includes the military personnel in the staff and service elements (e.g., medics, ordnance, logistics, etc.) comprising the central, regional, provincial and district military headquarters, and in rear service technical units of all types directly subordinate to these headquarters. The need for administrative service forces, and hence their size, varies widely from province to province.

27. We cannot be confident of the total size of the administrative service forces at any given time. Information on the current strength of the administrative services at the various echelons is insufficient to establish a firm estimate. This force has almost certainly suffered attrition and has probably been drawn down to provide some combat replacements. Moreover, we do not estimate

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LAOS PANHANDLE AREA COMMUNIST ROADNET

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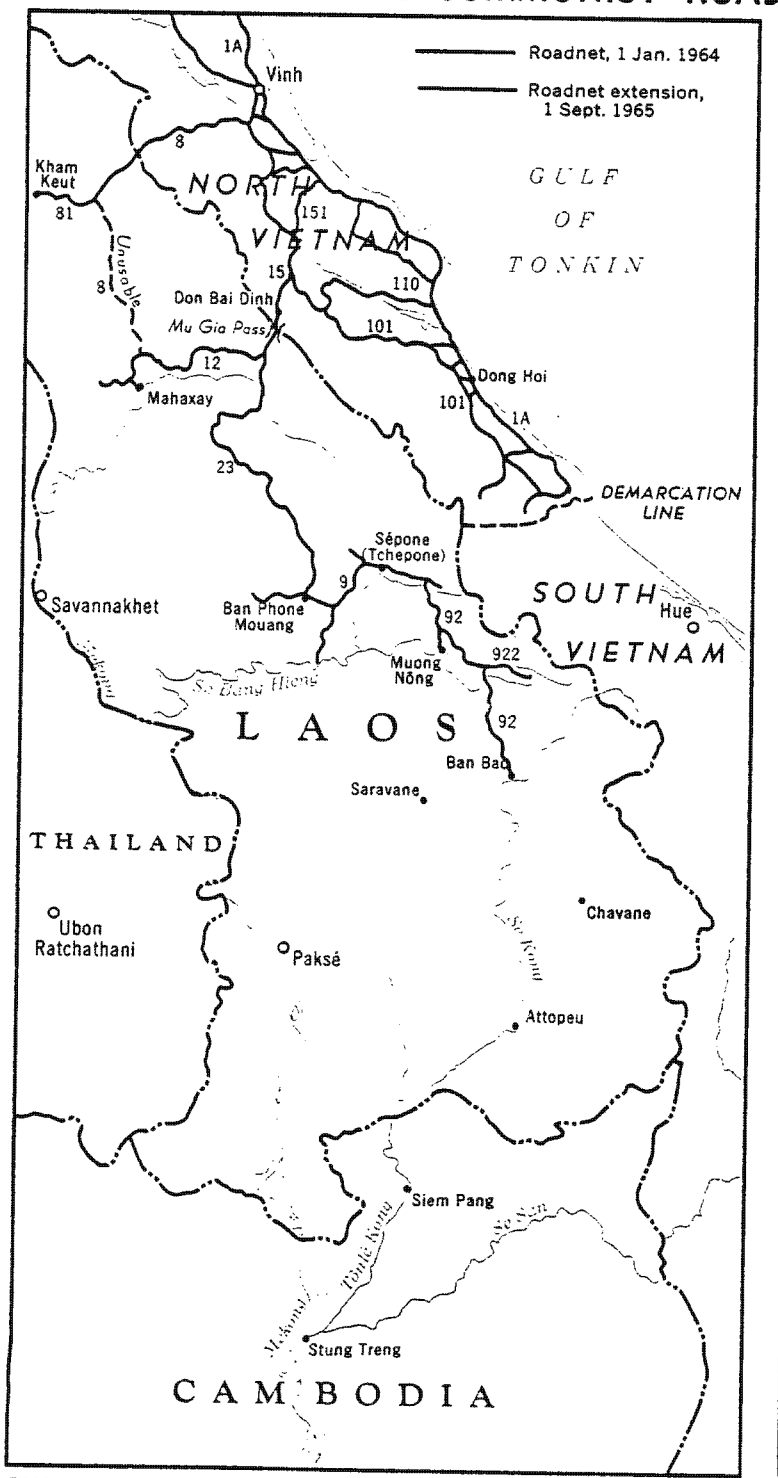
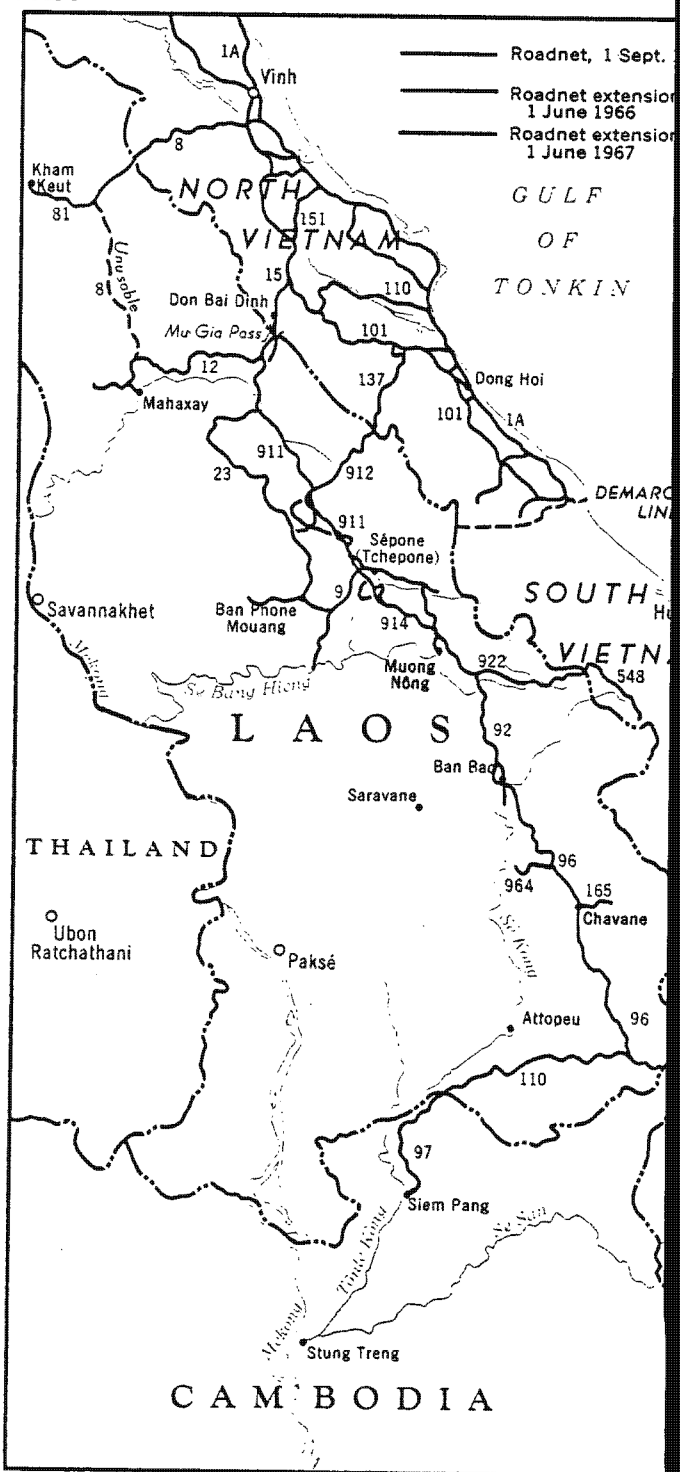
EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNIST ROADNET





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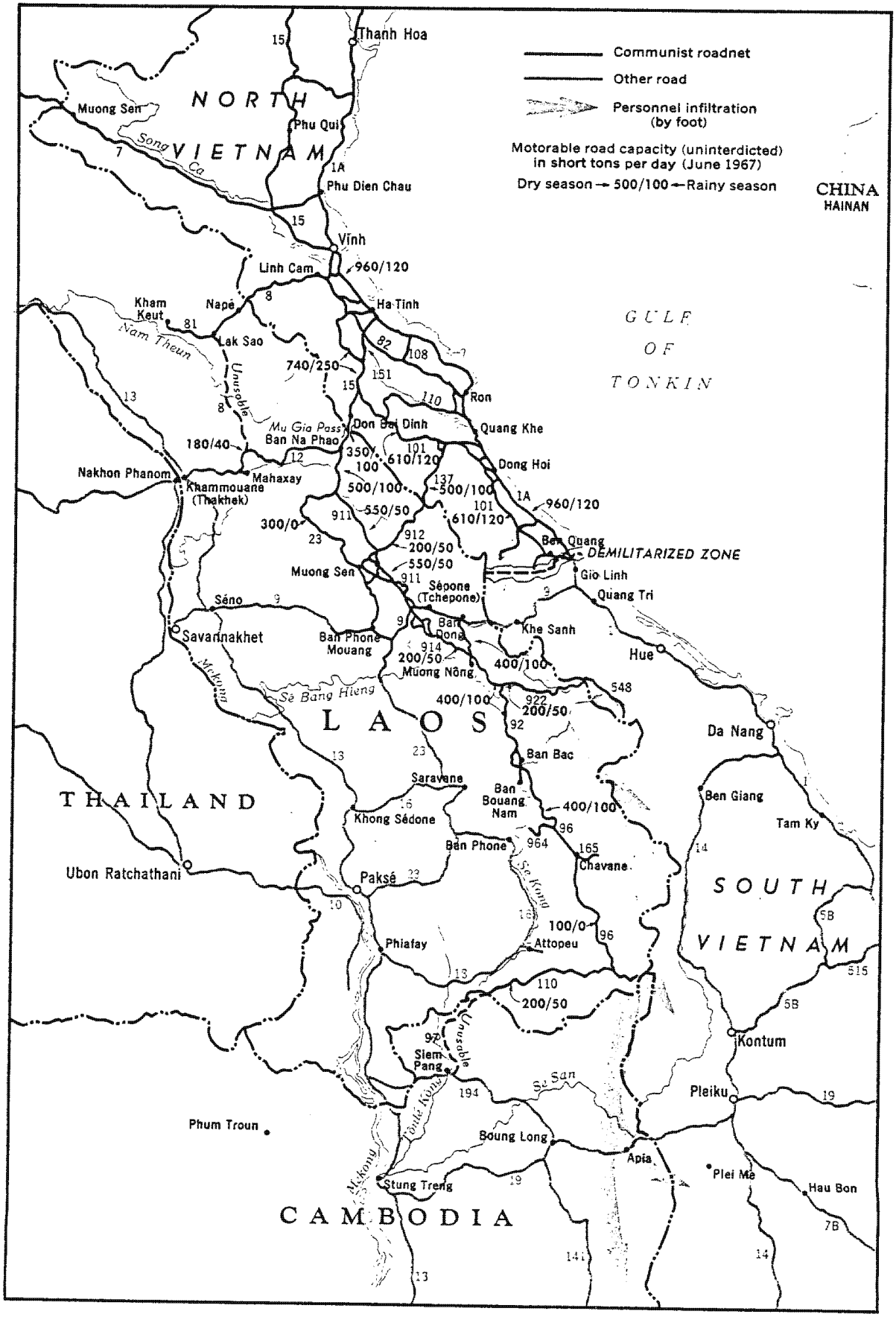
INFILTRATION AND ROAD CAPACITIES



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the size of the administrative service units located outside the boundaries of South Vietnam which support the forces in the DMZ and the western highlands. In light of these considerations, we estimate that there are now at least 35,000-40,000 administrative service personnel in South Vietnam who are performing essential administrative support functions. In addition, almost anyone under VC control can be and is impressed into service to perform specific administrative or support tasks as local conditions require.

28. *Guerrillas.* The guerrillas provide an essential element of the VC combat capability. They are organized into squads and platoons which are not necessarily restricted to their home village or hamlet. Typical missions for guerrillas are terrorist and sabotage activities, protection of villages and hamlets, provision of assistance to VC Main and Local force units as well as NVA, and the creation of local threats in order to divert allied forces to local security missions.

29. The guerrilla force has been subject to conflicting pressures. On the one hand, increasing numbers of guerrillas have been drawn upon to provide replacements for the VC Main and Local forces, because these have suffered heavy casualties as a result of more intense combat. At the same time, numerous captured documents as well as VC propaganda indicate a concern to increase the guerrilla force substantially. There is evidence which suggests that the leadership set very high force goals for the guerrillas but had, by mid-1966, fallen far short of its aims.

30. Information from captured documents leads us to believe that we have previously underestimated the guerrilla strength. Certain Communist documents which date from early 1966 assert that there were then about 170,000-180,000 guerrillas. This figure was almost certainly exaggerated. There is evidence which suggests that the Communists sometimes consider other groups part of the guerrilla force and therefore carry a larger number of guerrillas on their rolls. There is also considerable uncertainty over the accuracy of VC reporting at the lower levels. We believe that guerrilla strength has declined over the past year or so because of losses, upgrading of some personnel to Main and Local force units, and recruiting difficulties. We are unable to substantiate the extent to which the VC have been able to replace guerrilla losses. Considering all the available evidence and allowing for some uncertainties, we estimate that the current strength of the guerrilla force is 70,000-90,000.

31. *The Political Organization.* Presiding over the Communist effort is the political apparatus. This includes the leadership and administration of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the People's Revolutionary Party (the name under which the North Vietnamese Communist Party operates in South Vietnam), both of which extend down to the hamlet level. The apparatus not only acts as a government in VC-controlled areas but also has major responsibilities for maintaining morale and for mobilizing manpower and other resources in support of the war effort. Its functions are not primarily military and it is therefore not included in the military order of battle. Nevertheless, it does represent a continuing potential for organizing and motivating the military forces. Through this apparatus the Communists seek to control the people of

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South Vietnam. It is, therefore, a key element which ultimately will have to be overcome along with the military and guerrilla forces. Its numbers are large—with a hard core estimated at about 75,000-85,000—but more important is the wide geographical extent of its power and the dedication and effectiveness of its personnel.

32. *Other Communist Organizations.* The Communists make a deliberate effort to organize most of the people under their control into various work forces and semimilitary organizations. Among the more significant of these organizations are the self-defense forces, secret self-defense forces, and groups such as the "Assault Youth." Moreover, when occasion demands, almost every able-bodied person under VC control may be called upon to support the war effort.

33. The self-defense force is described by the Communists as a military organization. It is clear, however, that its organization and mission differ from that of village and hamlet guerrillas. Self-defense forces include people of all ages and a substantial percentage of them are females. They are largely unarmed and only partially trained. The duties of self-defense units include the maintenance of law and order, the construction of bunkers and strong points, warning against the approach of allied forces, and the defense of villages and hamlets in VC-controlled territory. Self-defense forces do not leave their home areas, and members generally perform their duties part-time. Their existence poses an impediment to allied sweeps and pacification, however, and in their defensive role, they inflict casualties on allied forces.

34. Another element, the secret self-defense forces, operates in government-controlled and contested areas. They provide a residual Communist presence in such areas and support the Communist effort primarily by clandestine intelligence activities.

35. During the past year we have learned more about a VC organization called "Assault Youth." They serve full time at district level and above, and they are organized into companies and platoons. Although some are armed, the Communists do not consider them a combat force; their primary mission appears to be logistical, frequently in battlefield areas. This organization also serves as a manpower pool and provides a training program for youth who later go into the VC Main and Local forces. Little information is available to indicate the strength or distribution of the "Assault Youth."

36. Our current evidence does not enable us to estimate the present size of these groups (self-defense, secret self-defense, the "Assault Youth," or other similar VC organizations) with any measure of confidence. Some documents suggest that in early 1966 the aggregate size of the self-defense force was on the order of 150,000. This force and the other groups, however, have unquestionably suffered substantial attrition since that time, as well as an appreciable decline in quality, because of losses, recruiting of some of their members into the guer-

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rillas or other VC military components and, particularly, the shrinkage in VC control of populated areas. Though in aggregate numbers these groups are still large and constitute a part of the overall Communist effort, they are not offensive military forces. Hence, they are not included in the military order of battle total. Nevertheless, some of their members account for a part of the total Communist military losses.

37. In sum, the Communist military and political organization is complex, and its aggregate numerical size cannot be estimated with confidence. Moreover, any such aggregate total would be misleading since it would involve adding components that have widely different missions and degrees of skill or dedication. The VC/NVA Military Force (Main and Local forces, administrative service elements and guerrillas) can be meaningfully presented in numerical totals and, as indicated above, we estimate that this Military Force is now at least 223,000–248,000. It must be recognized, however, that this Military Force constitutes but one component of the total Communist organization. Any comprehensive judgment of Communist capabilities in South Vietnam must embrace the effectiveness of all the elements which comprise that organization, the total size of which is of course considerably greater than the figure given for the Military Force.

B. The Command Structure

38. The Communists have continued to modify their command apparatus, and, in particular, Hanoi has significantly increased its direct control. This is most apparent in the DMZ and central highlands areas where Hanoi increasingly bypasses both COSVN and Military Region 5 (MR-5) Headquarters. With the exception of two VC divisions and one NVA division, all division headquarters and all the confirmed Fronts are in MR-5 or the DMZ area.[6] In addition to the creation of the DMZ Front, which is controlled directly by Hanoi, it appears almost certain that MR-5 has been divided into three operational areas: The Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region (formerly the Northern Front or Subregion), the B-3 or Western Highlands Front, and the remaining coastal provinces of the region.[7] There is substantial evidence that Hanoi also exercises direct military control over the Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region and the B-3 Front.

C. Logistical Support

39. During the past year captured documents and POW interrogations have provided a better basis for estimating how much of each class of supplies was needed and consumed by the Communist forces. Table 4 shows the estimated total daily Communist requirement in South Vietnam for Regular and Administrative Service Forces and that portion of it which comes from external sources.

40. About one-quarter of the daily requirement for both 1966 and 1967 was drawn from sources outside of South Vietnam. There is a growing dependence

[6] The remainder of the command structure consists of provincial commands and of separate units, both directly subordinate to the respective VC military regions.

[7] See map on opposite page for provinces included in these areas.

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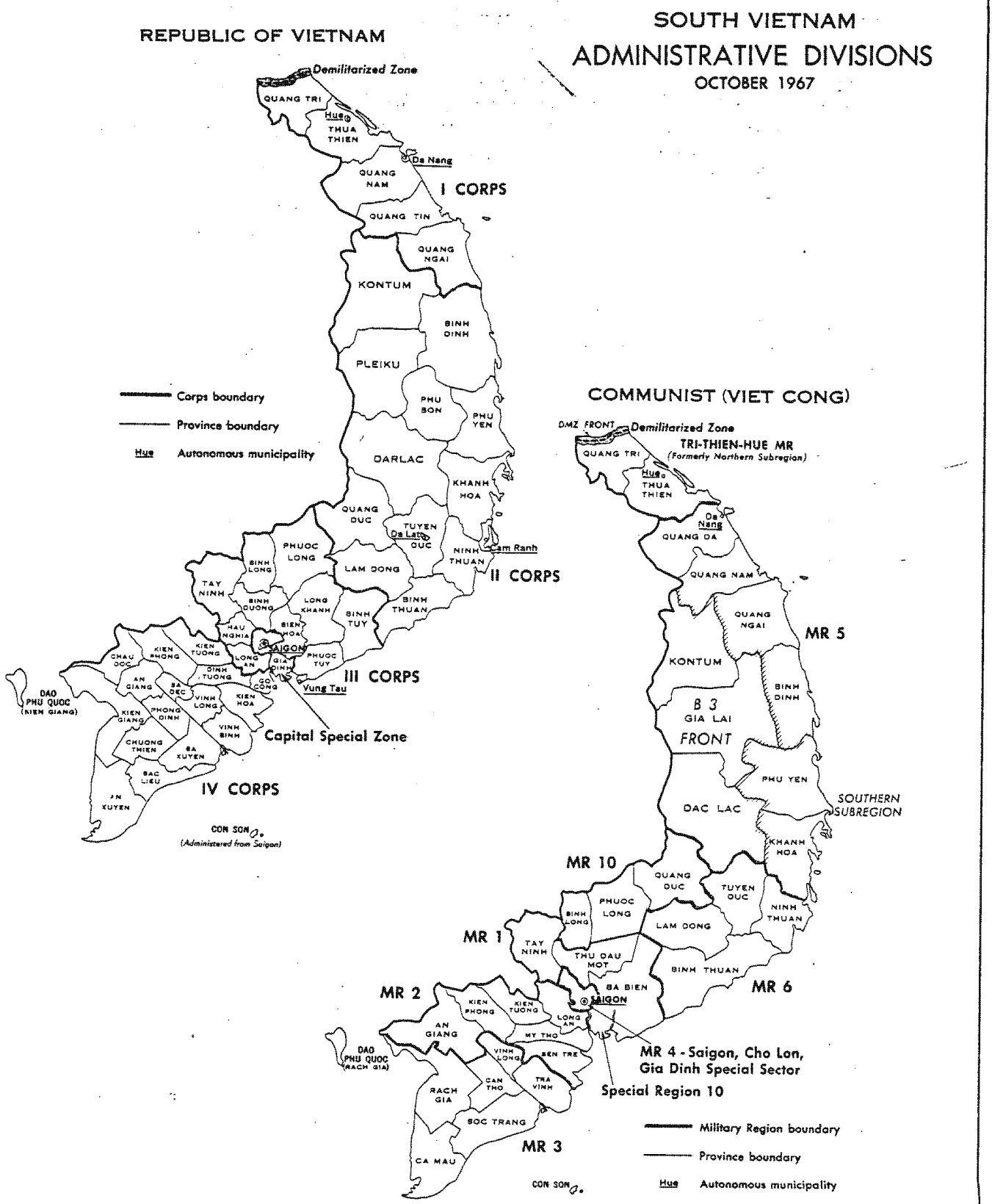

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on external sources, not only for Classes II and IV (weapons and equipment), Class V (ammunition), but also for Class I (food). This is partly because of allied denial efforts and partly a result of the growing proportion of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, especially since these are generally deployed in food deficit areas. VC guerrilla forces probably require a small amount of food and ammunition from external sources, but the bulk of their supplies is obtained from local sources within South Vietnam. We have not included guerrilla forces in the logistical computations.

TABLE 4

ESTIMATED DAILY LOGISTICAL RESUPPLY REQUIREMENTS FOR NVA AND VC REGULAR AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM[a]
(As of 30 September 1967)

Class	Short Tons Per Day	
	External	Total
I (Food)[b]	38-40	177-183
II & IV (Weapons, Quartermaster, Engineer, Medical, Signal, Chemical, etc.)	6-7	23-24
III (POL)	Negl.	Negl.
V (Ammunition)[c]	10	11
TOTAL	54-57	211-218

[a] Based on 118,000 NVA and VC Main and Local force troops, and 35,000-40,000 administrative support troops. Requirements are computed on the basis of actual strength, which is about 70 percent of full TO&E strength. In estimating weapons requirements, losses due to capture or destruction were considered, as were losses due to normal attrition. In addition, an allowance was made to provide for the reequipping of those forces who are not presently equipped with the new family of weapons. These requirements, of course, will change as weapons losses fluctuate over time. Ammunition requirements are based upon estimates of actual ammunition expenditures in combat, and may be subject to a considerable margin of error.

[b] Includes a 15 percent factor for spoilage, but does not include replacement of food captured or destroyed by friendly forces.

[c] One-third of the weight of the external requirement represents a packaging factor; two-thirds of the weight is actual ammunition. No packaging factor is included in estimating internal ammunition requirements. The total ammunition requirement does include the external packaging factor.

41. Communist logistical requirements from external sources vary considerably in both amounts and class in the different areas of South Vietnam. In the northern provinces, for example, the requirement is probably higher per soldier than elsewhere in South Vietnam because the rate of combat there has been higher, and the troops are predominantly NVA and are better equipped. In the rice-deficit highlands, the external requirement for food is high. On the other hand, in the Delta and the Saigon area, Communist troops probably have no external requirement for food.

42. While we cannot estimate with confidence what proportions of external logistic resupply requirements are met by the respective routes into South Viet-

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nam, some generalizations can be made about the logistical systems involved. The road network through the Laotian Panhandle is used primarily to supply weapons, equipment, and ammunition. A portion of the food requirement for Communist forces in the northern provinces is infiltrated through or around the DMZ along with some other supplies. Cambodia is primarily a source for food (probably over 80 percent of the Communists' external requirement) and some items such as medical supplies and radios. Within South Vietnam, the Communist procurement and distribution system is usually organized under the Communist military regional headquarters.

43. *Food Supply.* The Communists continue to have problems with food supplies in certain areas, because of local shortages, distribution bottlenecks, and the effects of allied military operations which have increasingly intruded into Communist base areas and disrupted the supply network. The amount of Communist food supplies captured or destroyed by allied forces in 1967 is substantial. From 1 January through 30 August it amounted to an average of 55 to 75 tons per day, which is more than one-fourth the Communist Regular and Administrative Forces' daily requirement, and greater than their external requirement. But despite some severe local difficulties, the overall effectiveness of the Communist military forces has not yet been seriously impaired by these problems. The food requirements for the Communists in many areas are met from internal sources through taxation, purchase, and coercion. However, the Communist military forces in the DMZ area and in the rice-deficient areas in the highlands are largely dependent on imports from North Vietnam and Cambodia.

44. On balance, we believe that food supply problems for the Communists are likely to become more burdensome, and in some areas will impede military operations. Nevertheless, we do not believe that food shortages will greatly restrict overall Communist operations in the near future as long as the Communists have access to Cambodian rice.

45. *Impact of New and Heavier Weapons.* Communist forces in South Vietnam have increased their mortar, rocket, and artillery attacks. Over a year ago, 120 mm mortars and 70 mm and 75 mm howitzers began to be used. Other types of weapons have been employed since early 1967. These include Chinese Communists 102 mm rockets, Soviet 122 mm and 140 mm rockets, and RPG-7 antitank grenade launchers. In addition, the NVA has fired light and medium artillery into South Vietnam from positions within or north of the DMZ. The use of these heavier weapons in the DMZ area has increased substantially in 1967, and during periods of peak fire in September it is estimated that Communist forces in that area were expending mortar, rocket, and artillery ammunition at a rate of close to 4 tons per day.

46. The estimated ammunition expenditure for all mortar, artillery, and rocket weapons of the Communist forces in South Vietnam for the first 8 months of

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1967, not including that fired against allied forces just south of the DMZ averaged less than 1 ton per day. While logistic problems would inhibit increased use of these heavier weapons throughout South Vietnam on the scale they have been used near the DMZ, it is likely the Communists will increase their capabilities for mortar, rocket, and artillery attack against selected fixed targets.

47. Hanoi has recently concluded a new agreement with the USSR for military aid. It is possible that Hanoi has sought more sophisticated types of equipment than those now arriving on the scene. These might include cruise missiles and tactical rockets which could be used to support North Vietnamese operations in the DMZ area and against US warships.[8] A continuing and intensive watch has been maintained for any indications of the presence of these or larger missiles in North Vietnam. So far, no deliveries have been detected.

48. The North Vietnamese already have some SA-2s in the vicinity of the DMZ and we think it likely they might increase the numbers of SA-2s there. It is also possible, but less likely, that they would deploy SA-2s in Laos. They would almost certainly not introduce them into South Vietnam. It is possible that Hanoi would use aircraft against South Vietnam but we think this unlikely. In general, we believe that during the coming months the Soviets will continue to supply equipment designed to strengthen air and coastal defenses in North Vietnam and to increase the firepower of both the regular North Vietnamese forces and the Communist forces fighting in the South.

D. Communist Manpower in the South

49. *Communist Losses.* Total Communist losses have been rising sharply over the past 2 years. On the basis of the latest data, we estimate that total losses for 1967 will amount to about 170,000—an increase of about two-thirds compared with 1966. The bulk of these losses are killed-in-action as reported from body count. Our estimate of permanent losses from wounds is based on evidence indicating that for every 100 killed there would probably be 150 wounded, and that, of these, at least 35 die or are permanently disabled. Obviously, these figures involve a margin for error, but since they cannot take into account all casualties from air attacks or from artillery fire, or losses from sickness and accident, the killed and wounded estimates are probably not overstated. Figures for military returnees and prisoners are firm. But the number of deserters is an estimate based on a study that suggests there is likely to be one permanent desertion for every military returnee. If the overall totals do err, it is likely to be on the low side.

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[8] For more detailed information on the types of weapons which the Soviets might supply the North Vietnamese, and the likelihood of their doing so, see SNIE 11-11-67, "Soviet Attitudes and Intentions Toward the Vietnam War," dated 4 May 1967, SECRET. We believe the conclusions are still valid.

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TABLE 5

ESTIMATED COMMUNIST LOSSES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

	1966	1967 (Estimated Total)[a]
Killed-in-Action	55,500	90,000
Permanently Lost from Wounds	19,000	31,000
Military Returnees	13,000	21,000
Prisoners	2,500	7,000
Deserters	13,000	21,000
TOTAL	103,000[b]	170,000[b]

[a] The 1967 estimated totals are the projections of averages of Communist losses during the first 9 months of 1967.

[b] These totals include not only losses for Regular and Administrative Service Forces and guerrillas, but also losses for an unknown number of other Communist elements such as self-defense, secret self-defense forces, and "Assault Youth," etc.

50. A major problem in assessing the significance of these Communist losses is that we are unable to determine what proportion are suffered by the fighting forces and what proportion by such elements as the self-defense forces, "Assault Youth," conscripted laborers and other civilians caught up in combat areas. What is clear is that not all of the killed and wounded are members of primary fighting units (NVA Regular forces, VC Main and Local forces, and guerrillas). Consequently, we cannot estimate the loss to these Communist military forces for any given year.

51. *VC Manpower Inputs.* In the face of these increasingly heavy losses, the manpower resources available to the VC and the actual rate of recruitment are critical elements in an estimate of Communist capabilities to continue military operations. A calculation of manpower available to the VC for recruitment is difficult because of the absence of trustworthy population statistics. But even if such statistics were fairly accurate, major assumptions have to be made concerning what percentage of able-bodied males are available to the VC recruitment apparatus in their own areas, in the contested areas, and in GVN-controlled areas.

52. Bearing in mind these caveats, we estimate that the VC may have access to approximately 1.4 million males between the ages of 15 and 45. From this total, we believe that the VC could recruit from a manpower pool of some 700,000-800,000 men, though less than half of this total are in VC-controlled areas.

53. It is difficult to reconcile this apparently large block of manpower derived from limited demographic data, with the increasing evidence over the past year of VC problems in obtaining recruits. One reason for this discrepancy is that the manpower in VC areas is already subject to other important requirements which are related to the war effort, such as food production, and some of these tasks are increasing. A second reason for VC difficulties is that losses of all types have probably reduced the real, as opposed to the theoretical manpower

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available to the VC. The third, and perhaps most important reason is the declining ability of the VC to obtain recruits because of allied forays into contested areas, the mounting flow of refugees out of these areas, and the likelihood that individuals are more reluctant to enlist in the VC movement than in 1964-1965 when the Communists appeared to be riding a crest of success.

54. These increasing recruitment problems are least evident in the Regular forces and most conspicuous among the guerrillas and self-defense forces, and have resulted in unfilled recruitment quotas, reduced standards (as to age, physical condition, and political reliability), and greater employment of women and youth. They have been particularly severe in areas of intense allied military pressure, but have not been totally absent elsewhere. Moreover, the Revolutionary Development (RD) program poses a threat to Communist access to the population, and is undoubtedly one of the reasons the VC have decided to exert heavy pressure against it.

55. We estimated that during 1966 the VC were probably able to recruit about 7,000 men per month. A reevaluation of recruitment for early 1967, however, shows that this performance has fallen off. We estimate that the average monthly recruitment probably falls within the range of 3,000 to 5,000 men per month for the Main forces, the Local forces, and the guerrillas. In addition, however, the VC commonly upgrade personnel from the lower to the higher echelons of the Communist organization. For example, a Local force unit will receive replacements from village guerrillas in the area; and these guerrillas in turn may be replaced by hamlet guerrillas, self-defense forces, or "Assault Youth." Some recent evidence suggests that in IV Corps, hamlet guerrillas and hamlet self-defense forces are being consolidated.

56. In any case, a persuasive indication of growing manpower problems for the VC is the increasing number of individual NVA soldiers serving as replacements in VC Main forces units. A study in late 1966 of a number of VC units in III Corps area indicated that at least 23 percent of the men in VC Main force units were NVA replacements, and the percentage is probably higher now. VC units in I and II Corps probably contain a higher percentage of NVA personnel, but we have not found NVA personnel in VC units in the Delta.

57. *Quality and Morale.* The rapid manpower turnover caused by increasing casualties has lowered the quality of all the VC fighting forces, but it is not yet apparent that this has seriously impaired their military effectiveness. The Communists have been forced to rely more and more on coercion to obtain recruits, have made greater use of women to free men for combat, and have reduced their recruitment and training standards. The decline in quality has been greatest at the lower levels, where personnnel have repeatedly been siphoned off for higher echelons. More important, though probably not so pronounced, is the decline in the quality of the cadres—the cement of the VC organization.

58. In an endeavor to rectify this situation the Communists are resorting to several expedients to overcome weaknesses in their political operations. These

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include intensive reindoctrination sessions and the infusion of North Vietnamese cadre into the VC organization. Since mid-1966, the VC have also been shifting some experienced cadre down to the lower levels to improve the quality of leadership and to eliminate the overdependence of village and hamlet party chapters on higher echelons. Some administrative reorganizations have also been instituted in an attempt to strengthen local responsibility and initiative. The effects of such measures are not yet evident, but could somewhat improve VC efficiency at lower levels.

59. Captured documents and evidence from prisoners amply demonstrate that morale problems are becoming serious and are likely to become worse as the war continues. But there have been no mass defections. This year's returnee rate, a statistical indicator of morale, is well above last year's rate. Captured documents have repeatedly noted this trend as one of the Communists' major shortcomings. Since the bulk of the returnees come from the lower levels of the VC structure, the immediate effect of these losses has not been critical. The troops continue to fight well, and the VC infrastructure remains generally strong. Over the longer term, however, such losses not only deprive the Communists of manpower, but, more important, they erode the base of the VC infrastructure.

III. THE OUTLOOK FOR COMMUNIST FORCES

60. In early 1965, prior to the commitment of sizable US forces, the Communists apparently expected to administer a knockout blow. After a period of some uncertainty and hesitation created by the US intervention in 1965, and certain tactical setbacks to the Communist forces, a general political-military strategy was worked out at the 12th Plenum of the North Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1965. This spelled out how to fight the war and manage its international aspects under the altered circumstances.

61. The essence of these decisions was to maintain sufficient forces in being to support a prolonged and aggressive war of attrition. Their objective in pursuing this strategy was and is to persuade the US that it cannot win; that it must eventually pull out or settle on terms favorable to Hanoi's further pursuit of its political goals. As part of this strategy, the war would be conducted without specific timetables; negotiations would be avoided unless from a position of significant military successes; and an effort would be made to limit the risks of an expanded war in the North or throughout Southeast Asia. This strategy aimed at maintaining a continuous threat by Regular forces, avoiding combat under unfavorable conditions, sustaining a high level of guerrilla activity, and undertaking limited objective offensives when favorable opportunities arise.

62. During 1966 and thus far in 1967, the Communists have apparently adhered to these basic decisions. For example, a new debate arose in late 1966 over the role of the guerrillas with some officials advocating a greater role for these forces at the expense of the Main forces. This proposition has apparently been rejected as tantamount to accepting a "strategic" reversal. Nevertheless, it is clear that debates over military-political tactics are continuing.

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63. Perhaps the most important problem for Hanoi during the last year has been how to maintain military pressure in the face of the superior firepower and mobility of the Allied forces. Its answer to this problem has been to emphasize artillery, rocket, and mortar attacks, especially on I Corps, and to develop substantial threats by large units in border areas in such a way as to spread thin the Allied forces, open opportunities for localized "victories," and create better conditions for attacks against the RD program. Over the past year the Communists have used elements of at least three and possibly four divisions in the DMZ area plus artillery and some air defense units. Another buildup of Communist forces has taken place in the highlands along the Cambodian border. Such threats tie down large US forces in these areas, thereby lessening Allied military pressures elsewhere.

64. *Future Force Levels.* Regardless of their previous policy decisions, the Communists will assess the actual situation as it evolves. Their decisions as to force structure and strengths over the next year will be affected in part by the level of combat, their casualty rates, the extent of any further buildup of Allied forces in the South, and the overall impact of the war effort against the North. Another factor which complicates estimates of future force structure and strength levels is that North Vietnam retains the capability to move division size forces across the DMZ. Should they exercise this option, then the total force structure in South Vietnam could be expanded relatively quickly by introducing one or two divisions into Quang Tri Province. Regardless of whether they introduce these divisions in the DMZ area, we feel the NVA will still try to expand its Regular forces in South Vietnam, by the deployment of some new combat infantry regiments. However, this may not result in any net increase in the numerical strength of Regular forces since continuing losses may further reduce the average unit strength.

65. Taking into consideration the estimated rates of infiltration, and allowing for the downward trend in population control by the VC, the rising Communist casualties, and VC recruiting problems, we conclude that the strength of the Communist military forces and political organizations in South Vietnam declined in the last year. The major portion of this decline has probably been felt at the lowest levels, reflecting a deliberate policy of sacrificing this level to maintain the structure of political cadres and the strength of the Regular military forces. Whether this trend will continue is difficult to estimate. There are still important unknowns and variables involved in measuring total losses against inputs from recruiting and infiltration. Moreover, there are alternative strategies, such as avoiding combat for prolonged periods, which the Communists might adopt to reduce casualties and conserve their forces. Another option, though less likely, would be for the Communists deliberately to reduce the strength of the Regular forces, in order to preserve guerrilla forces and strengthen the political apparatus. The locale and effectiveness of all allied operations will also have an important bearing on future Communist force levels; losses in the northern provinces and western highlands could be made up more readily through infiltration than losses in the Delta, where the burden is on VC recruitment.

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66. In any case, we believe that a major effort will be required to maintain the Regular forces and guerrillas at or near present levels. To do so will call for both a level of infiltration much higher than that observed in 1967 and intensive VC recruitment as well. Considering all the relevant factors, however, we believe that there is a fairly good chance that the overall strength and effectiveness of the military forces and the political infrastructure will continue to decline.

67. *Logistical Support.* The Communists will continue to have difficulties with internal distribution of supplies in South Vietnam that will cause local shortages and interfere with Communist operations from time to time. Their dependence on supplies from external sources is growing and could increase further over the next year, even if their strength declines somewhat. Nevertheless, we believe that the Communists will be able to continue to meet at least their essential supply requirements for the level of forces and activities in South Vietnam described in this estimate.

68. *Future Strategy.* The Communists apparently recognize that the chances of a complete military victory have disappeared, and they aim instead at a protracted war. Their objectives in this phase of the war are to immobilize and wear down the Allied military forces, to maintain base areas, expand their political agitation and control in contested and GVN areas, and defeat the RD program. In pursuit of these objectives, their tactics are to combine and coordinate closely their military operations and political activity.

69. Our judgment is that the Communists still retain adequate capabilities to support this strategy for at least another year. Whether or not Hanoi does in fact persist with this strategy depends not only on its capabilities to do so, but on a number of political and international considerations not treated in this estimate, such as the state of Sino-Soviet relations, conditions inside China, and Hanoi's view of US will and determination. Even if some combination of circumstances should make it impossible or undesirable for Hanoi to continue employing large conventional forces, the Communists would still have the capability to continue some forms of struggle—though at greatly reduced levels.

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